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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: CHIEF OF STAFF BUYUKANIT TAKES ON
GOVERNMENT FOREIGN POLICY

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Long-standing strains between the Turkish General Staff (TGS) and the AKP -led government have escalated recently into regular confrontations over foreign policy. On France, Cyprus and Iraq, Chief of Staff (CHOD) Buyukanit has preempted or disputed government positions, leaving the GOT scrambling to agree with or to explain away the CHOD's statements. Initially hesitant to take on the military, FM Gul and PM Erdogan have recently risen to the challenge, reminding TGS that the government makes policy and calling for an end to the so-called "deep state" in which the military is rumored to play a role. In a bizarre twist, recent comments by former President Kenan Evren, a retired general who led the 1980 coup, suggesting that Turkey should embrace federalism and look for political solutions to Turkey's Kurdish problem have raised calls for a trial of those involved in the coup. With Presidential elections less than two months away and PM Erdogan's candidacy a possibility, the brinkmanship will likely intensify. END SUMMARY.

MILITARY FREEZES RELATIONS WITH FRANCE

12. (C) With the late April-early May Presidential election by Parliament drawing near, and AKP (Justice and Development Party) PM Erdogan's potential candidacy on the table, the long strained civil-military dialogue has become sharper (see reftels). In mid-November 2006, Land Forces Commander GEN Ilker Basbug announced that in response to the October 12 French Lower Assembly passage of a bill criminalizing denial of an Armenian genocide Turkey would freeze its military relations with France. Days later, Buyukanit issued an order to cancel all planned bilateral mil-mil activities. However, when initially queried, the MFA was unable to confirm that this was the government's policy. The GOT had threatened a series of actions, including a bill calling on France to recognize its own atrocities in Algeria, but in the end, the military took the lead in leveling the punishment. This decision effectively put much of the bilateral Turkey-France relationship on ice and provided a chilling indication of the price for crossing TGS.

CYPRUS - A POLITICAL OR MILITARY ISSUE?

13. (C) In December, Buyukanit complained that TGS was not notified about the government's initiative to open select Turkish ports in exchange for the opening of Cypriot ports, suggesting it was a "deviation from official state policy" and that the military should have been consulted. President Sezer echoed this complaint. Erdogan rose to the challenge

and dismissed the need for the government to consult with the military or the President before taking a decision, saying that relevant institutions would be informed once the proposals are developed. In fact, senior MFA officials have told us, TGS was consulted, but its leadership chose to object anyway.

¶4. (C) Not content to let the Cyprus issue lie, in January 2007 Buyukanit expressed displeasure about Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) "President" Talat's unilateral offer to dismantle the Lokmaci Foot Bridge on Ledra Street in Nicosia as a gesture to further negotiations to destroy the Lokmaci barrier and allow freedom of movement from north to south. TGS claimed that the military had jurisdiction since the bridge is located in a military zone, and opposed the dismantling of the structure without a reciprocal gesture by the Greek Cypriots. Instead of taking on Buyukanit, PM Erdogan lamented Talat's lack of advance consultation with the GOT before such a decision but ultimately deferred to Talat as TRNC President, and the bridge was destroyed.

DARK FORCES AT WORK

¶5. (C) In addition to making pronouncements on specific issues, Buyukanit has continued to issue pointed warnings aimed at the AKP government. On December 23, the anniversary of the death of three Turkish soldiers who resisted a group attempting to overthrow the Republic in 1931, Buyukanit issued a statement about the role of the military in protecting Ataturk's republic and underscored that the military will continue to protect the secular Turkish Republic against those who are "underhandedly trying to take it back in time and against the dark forces."

¶6. (C) During his February 14-16 visit to Washington, Buyukanit repeated this theme, reportedly stating that Turkey is facing more threats to its national security than at any time in the history of the Republic, but that its "dynamic forces" will prevent any attempt to break up the country. Such statements made on the 10-year anniversary of the February 28, 1997 "soft" coup in which PM Erbakan, the Islamist Welfare Party leader, was forced from power, evoked unpleasant memories of military intervention. According to Bilkent University Political Science Professor Omer Genckaya, this marked the first time in TGS history that a CHOD had given such a press conference from Washington, suggesting that strong words made against the backdrop of the White House could be read as indicating that Buyukanit has US backing.

NO MEETING WITH THE KRG

¶7. (C) It was Buyukanit's February 14 statement in Washington that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leadership supports the PKK terrorist organization and the military would not meet with them -- which was made in response to PM Erdogan's suggestion that the GOT would consider meeting the KRG leadership if it would help bring peace to Turkey -- that drew the most vociferous government response. Gul retorted that the "military speaks with its weapons but the politicians must do what is required." Erdogan opined that Buyukanit's comment could only represent his personal views because such a statement from an institution would be "dangerous." Unable to resist the bait, Buyukanit issued a TGS statement that the words of the CHOD reflect the official position of the General Staff.

¶8. (C) After almost two weeks of tit-for-tat and perhaps recognizing that the issue had gotten out of control, the government postponed a planned Gul meeting with Necirvan Barzani and the issue of meetings with the KRG was added to the February 23 National Security Council (NSC) agenda. The NSC subsequently issued a statement that "it would be beneficial to intensify political and diplomatic efforts" in northern Iraq and the issue dropped from the media radar.

JOURNALISTIC WITCH HUNT

¶9. (SBU) The Turkish public-at-large has evidenced little concern over TGS' dabbling in foreign policy. According to Professor Genckaya, 60% of Turks still consider the military the most popular institution, with religion a close second. TGS, he said, is the physical protector of Turks and Islam is their spiritual protector.

¶10. (C) The journalistic community, however, did take note, both reporting and questioning the appropriateness of the TGS statements and military influence over foreign policy. TGS, in turn, has been watching the media. According to a March 7 press story, TGS has recommended that the accreditation of ten unnamed print and television journalists from major media outlets be rescinded and published a list of several dozen additional journalists who were placed on a TGS "watch list". The lists were compiled following a systematic TGS recording and review of the journalists' statements about the military from January to September 2006. In addition to these two groups, a third list of media outlets, primarily Islamic, have no TGS accreditation. (Note: The TGS practice of review and withdrawal of press accreditation began following the February 28, 1997 "soft coup").

¶11. (C) TGS condemned the article exposing the results of its accreditation review and announced that it would launch an investigation into the press "leak". Whether the information was leaked or supplied remains a matter of speculation. Publication of the names and photos of journalists of TGS concern could be construed as a warning to those individuals and as a powerful tool to restrain the media. The extent of the impact of this TGS action on freedom of the press will be evident in the headlines over the coming weeks.

GOVERNMENT SCARE TACTIC?

¶12. (C) Try the Coup Leaders: Kenan Evren, the 88-year old former general turned President who led Turkey's third coup in 1980, surfaced in early March after years of silent retirement to suggest that Turkey consider a decentralized political structure with power devolved to regional governments. Coming from Evren, who, as President, in 1982 oversaw the redrafting of the constitution to centralize the government's authority and who called Kurds "mountain Turks", the statement seemed to come out of left field. It was portrayed in the press as support for Kurdish autonomy, and raised the ire of the provincial authorities in Evren's home town of Mugla, who have initiated a criminal investigation into his comments amid calls that he be tried for his role in the 1980 coup.

13.(C) Destroy the Deep State: Following the tragic January murder of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink a video surfaced that purportedly showed a group of jandarma officials posing hand-in-hand with the suspected murderer behind a Turkish flag. The video, together with claims that the Istanbul police had received a tip that Dink was being targeted but did not warn him or take action, raised questions about the so-called "deep state" which is thought to link criminal networks and representatives of state institutions, including the jandarma and the military. Erdogan heightened the rhetoric by publicly acknowledging his belief in the existence of a "deep state" and saying that "we have to minimize it, and if possible, to destroy it."

¶14. (C) COMMENT: TGS believes that the prospect of an Erdogan presidency coupled with an AKP government constitutes a threat to the traditional secular balance. In the next month we expect TGS to challenge the government in general and Erdogan in particular on every issue with a perceived security component in order to reinforce its authority over these issues and to discourage Erdogan from throwing his hat into the ring. Initially reluctant to challenge the military, the government now appears to be gaining confidence in its ability to push back in areas where it perceives its authority to be clear. By evoking unpleasant memories about past coups and suspicions about a so-called "deep state," the GOT and its supporters in the media and elsewhere may successfully reinforce in the public mind the value of a

democratically-elected government. Additionally, TGS could find that there is a limit to what even its more loyal supporters will overlook. END COMMENT.

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